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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC #02186-84
9 April 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA : Chairman, National Intelligence Council
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council (H. Meyer)

FROM : Major General Edward B. Atkeson, USA
National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces

SUBJECT : Development of the US Light Division and Likely Soviet
Reactions (U)

1. For many years the JCS has wrestled with the problem of increasing weight of military equipment and shortages of air and sealift. The problem has been complicated by the necessity for multiple contingency missions for units in different theaters, questions of warning time for forward deployment in crisis, and questions of the suitability of certain types of equipment in particular theaters. Overarching all of this is a realization that the Defense budget is unlikely to expand at the rates previously envisioned and that the active strength of the Army will remain essentially unchanged at the 781,000 level for the rest of the decade. (U)

2. In recent years the Army has had five basic types of division:

- armored
- mechanized
- infantry
- airborne (parachute)
- airmobile (helicopter).

All of these units require from 16,000 to 19,000 men. In addition, the Army has maintained one "high-tech" test-bed division (the 9th) which has been essentially an infantry division, but with special, experimental equipment assigned from time to time (dunebuggies, motorcycles, special electronic warfare equipment, etc.). Now the Army plans to field an all-new "light" division of no more than 10,000 men. The 7th Infantry Division, at Fort Ord, California, will be the first to pare down to the "light" size. (U)

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3. The advantages of the light division are cited as:
 - requires one-third the airlift of a mechanized division.
 - can arrive in an operational theater in one-third the time.
 - provides more fighting infantrymen (men in foxholes) than our present divisions.
 - does not require as much tonnage to maintain in combat as other divisions. (U)
4. These advantages are achieved at the expense of:
 - reduced firepower.
 - less on-the-ground mobility.
 - requirements for supplemental support units tailored to the theater of deployment. (U)

5. The Army plans to activate two light divisions over the next two years. The 9th high-tech test bed division will be reduced to 14,500 men and will continue to serve as a laboratory model for light forces. While the light divisions will be particularly useful in Third World areas, they will have applicability to Europe, too, particularly in built-up areas and in forests. (U)

6. It seems ironic that the US Army is lightening its structure while the Soviets are heavying theirs up. The current reorganization of Soviet tank and motorized rifle divisions is adding small numbers of tanks and substantial artillery to their forces. In addition, the Soviets are equipping their airborne divisions with 7.5 ton BMD armored vehicles. Only the Soviet airborne division will have fewer men than the US light division. The new light division concept relies heavily upon packaged reinforcement of the basic division to make it battle-worthy in the face of Soviet forces. (C)

7. It is too early to assess Soviet reactions to this important shift in our force structure. Very soon, however, we may expect to hear propaganda about how we are developing an "interventionalist" force to crush local struggles for "national liberation." Attached (Tab A) is an Army publication explaining the new unit and (Tab B) an assessment recently drafted by a working group on which I served at the Army War College on likely Soviet reactions to US development of light forces. (U)


Edward B. Atkeson

Attachments:

- A - The U.S. Army Light
Infantry Division
- B - Subcommittee #6 Report
on Light Forces

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MEMORANDUM FOR: DCI
DDCI

VIA : C/NIC
VC/NIC (H. Meyer)

FROM : NIO/GPF

SUBJECT : Development of the US Light Division and Likely Soviet
Reactions (U)

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THE MILITARY CONFLICT COMMITTEE

Sixth Working Meeting - Carlisle Barracks, PA

3-5 April 1984

Subcommittee #6 Report on Light Forces

Subcommittee #6 examined the question of likely Soviet responses to US formation of light forces. There is no known discussion of the matter in Soviet speeches or open literature. Subcommittee attention focused on possible responses for which we have no evidence at the present time. The methodology pursued by the group was as follows:

- Identify areas of the world where the Soviets might anticipate encountering US light forces.
- Define likely Soviet military objectives in the areas selected.
- Visualize the strengths and weaknesses of US light forces in the environments depicted.
- Describe the types of Soviet forces which would be particularly suitable to deal with the challenges posed by US light forces and which might capitalize on their weaknesses and limitations.

2. The Subcommittee recognized the suitability of US light forces for rapid reaction to crises in Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia. It considered the likelihood of direct Soviet intervention in these areas, out of context of a major US-USSR conflict, as low, even where Cuban or other surrogate forces might be involved. While we would expect Soviet forces in Cuba or other distant areas to defend themselves from attack, we would also expect them to avoid involvement in local conflicts where US force potential was apparently greater.

3. It is likely that Soviet reactions to the development of US light forces, and more especially to their employment in Third World areas, will be primarily political and psychological. The Soviets will probably identify the forces as further evidence of US interventionism, imperialism and "gun-boat" diplomacy. US statements about the strategic mobility of the forces are likely to be seized upon as admissions of American ill-will toward the Third World, in general, and toward struggles for national liberation, in particular.

4. Soviet military actions against US light forces in these circumstances are likely to be limited to military and technical assistance and training. The Soviets may furnish advice to radical regimes and insurrection forces on the limitations of light forces, particularly with regard to tactical mobility, sustainability, and firepower. They would also probably focus equipment deliveries on items which would be most useful in countering these forces: battlefield rockets, mines and booby traps, light vehicles, communications equipment, night vision devices, body armor and light anti-aircraft and anti-vehicular weapons.

5. A special case of potential US-USSR conflict exists in the Middle East. An Israeli threat to the Syrian regime could trigger a Soviet response with the possibility of US involvement. US airborne or other light forces might be required in order to quickly demonstrate US interest, balance hostile Soviet moves, and, hopefully, stabilize the situation. While Soviet airborne forces are maintained in a high readiness status and have apparently been alerted for previous actions in the region, the Soviets may wish to enhance their ability in a future crisis for dealing with US light infantry forces by adding air and sealifted armored units to their potential Syrian force packages. These, of course, would require additional mobile air defense and tactical air contingents. Important factors for Soviet development of these forces would be enhanced airlift and greater in-flight refueling capabilities.

6. Another theater of potential US-USSR confrontation exists in the Persian Gulf. Light forces would be particularly suitable for mountain operations in Iran, and have the additional advantage of being transportable to the region in a fraction of the time required for heavier formations. Nevertheless, the US light division is not designed for hostile entry into its area of deployment, and the Soviets may calculate that preliminary staging through Arab airports would be required. Airfields on the western and southern coasts of the Gulf would appear likely candidates for this purpose.

7. In this event, the Soviets might wish to develop a capability for rapidly seizing control of Gulf airports and the Straits of Hormuz in conjunction with an invasion of Iran. The purpose would be to forestall US reaction, both militarily and politically, by confronting the US and the West

with a quick fait accompli. The Subcommittee judged that in such a case the Soviets would require greatly enhanced airlift capability and improved in-flight refueling techniques for their tactical air forces. Also, as with the Syrian case, they would require substantial air defense and tactical air reinforcement in the area to deal with local and possible US reactions.

8. The Subcommittee also judged that the Soviets would wish to seal the Straits of Hormuz in such a campaign, necessitating greater naval and naval air and infantry deployments in the region in peacetime. Soviet facilities in the Red Sea area might provide suitable sites for such deployments.

9. In the NATO Central Region the Subcommittee recognized the suitability of US light forces for operations in urban and wooded areas. If the Soviets were to make a similar assessment, they may wish to develop small forces and tactics for preempting emplacement of the US forces. Air assault units might be considered particularly appropriate for this function, perhaps in conjunction with the actions of Operational Maneuver Groups. Airborne and heliborne troops might be able to seize key terrain around urban centers and forests to temporarily deny ground access to the areas of greatest defensive strength. The intent would not be to occupy the towns or forests themselves, but to delay US occupation until other Soviet ground forces had arrived.

10. In the AFNORTH region, the Subcommittee took note of the possibility of US light force deployments to Norway and Denmark. To foreclose these moves, the Soviets may count on mounting amphibious operations, both in the Norwegian Sea and further south, via the Baltic, against Jutland. Both of these campaigns could be substantially expedited and strengthened with

simultaneous airborne operations. As in the Persian Gulf area, however, the Soviets would need to strengthen their airlift and long range tactical air capabilities.

11. Finally, the Subcommittee considered the NATO southern region, particularly with regard to the potential employment of US light forces in Greece or Turkey. In view of the strength of the US naval position in the Mediterranean and the probability of NATO blockage of the Dardanelles to Soviet passage, possibilities for quick Soviet preemption of US light force deployment appeared somewhat slimmer than in other areas. It seemed more likely to the Subcommittee that the Soviets would attempt to bomb or to attack by missile the NATO airfields and other ports of entry. In either event, the Soviet forces and tactics required would not appear substantially different than if the US attempted to reinforce with other types of forces.